



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **BUFFALO ICE ENDS FISCAL YEAR WITH MORE THAN 3,800 ARRESTS AND REMOVALS**

*Enforcement Actions Include 15 Percent Increase in Deportations and Hundreds of Criminal Arrests*

BUFFALO, N.Y – The Buffalo office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced that ICE agents and officers in the state completed more than 3,800 successful enforcement actions, including criminal arrests and deportations, during the fiscal year that ended on September 30th. These enforcement actions reflect ICE's continuing efforts to address individuals and organizations in New York that pose national security or public safety threats.

ICE's Office of Investigations and Office of Detention and Removal Operations announced the enforcement actions jointly. The arrests and deportations include some of the worst of the criminal element, according to ICE Special Agent in Charge Peter J. Smith and ICE Detention and Removal Field Office Director William M. Cleary.

The successful Buffalo Office of Investigations enforcement year included 468 arrests for criminal violations of customs and immigration laws, as well as 898 arrests for administrative immigration violations. ICE offices in Buffalo, Syracuse, Massena, Alexandria Bay, Albany and Rouses Point made arrests. The arrests included a significant investigation in the Albany area that is an outstanding example of the comprehensive use of both customs and immigration law.

The enforcement results also include the deportation of 1,918 aliens, including 1,300 criminals more than 600 immigration violators. The enforcement actions resulted in a 15% increase in the number of aliens removed as compared to the prior fiscal year, which ended September 30<sup>th</sup>. According to Cleary, "The deportations from the Buffalo area of operations include some of the worst criminals in New York State."

Many of the removals resulted from the New Institutional Release Program (IRP) at Batavia Federal Detention Facility. The program allows ICE to identify deportable criminals serving time in state prisons and take them into custody for removal following their criminal sentences. The IRP prevents these individuals from returning to the streets to continue their criminal careers and victimize innocent New Yorkers.

The Buffalo Fugitive Operations team also arrested 221 fugitives from justice with final orders of removal based on criminal convictions, immigration violations or warrants from other countries. The removal of criminal aliens from

the United States has become a national priority. Failure to obey removal orders from an immigration court makes a person a fugitive. Cleary said ICE officers are dedicated to enforcing court orders. He also pointed out that detention and removal officers frequently take part in dangerous operations while deporting detainees back to their native countries. In addition 30 detention officers spend weeks taking part in law enforcement and rescue operations as part of the federal effort to assist the people of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

The two major ICE enforcement programs complement each other by investigating and dismantling criminal organizations -- such as drug, alien, or weapons smuggling organizations -- and then removing foreign national criminals from the streets of upstate New York.

Special Agent in Charge Peter J. Smith said, "ICE is using its unique authorities in a coordinated approach to enforcing customs and immigration laws with the goal of making the Empire State a safer place for all residents." Smith said an example of ICE's unique authorities is that in many investigations agents can use immigration laws or customs laws to attack criminal organizations. Smith noted that if an organization is smuggling aliens customs laws can be used to seize the assets. In the case of drug or criminal activity ICE can use immigration laws to arrest and deport alien gang members.

Detention and Removal FOD Cleary pointed out that many of the successful criminal cases from the investigations program are subsequently removed from the country after serving their convictions. Failure to obey removal orders from an immigration court makes a person a fugitive, Cleary said, and ICE officers are dedicated to enforcing the court order.

Cleary said, "Removing nearly 2,000 individuals in one year should put criminals and immigration violators on notice that we are committed to maintaining the security of the country and protecting the public safety of the Empire State."

The combined fiscal year 2005 enforcement actions for Buffalo included:

- 468 criminal arrests by Office of Investigations
- 898 administrative immigration arrests
- 221 immigration fugitive apprehensions
- 1,918 removals by Detention and Removal
- 133 successful federal indictments
- 163 federal court convictions

Some of the significant ICE criminal investigations included:

- In November of 2004 ICE agents in Albany brought to conclusion a two year investigation of two Chinese buffet restaurant enterprises suspected of hiring undocumented aliens and subsequently laundering of the proceeds from the criminal enterprise. The case resulted in 9 criminal arrests, 84 administrative immigration arrests and the seizure of \$1.4 million in assets. Operation China Buffet is a perfect example of how ICE is using its unique immigration and customs authority to target criminal enterprises. The owners and managers of the China Buffet Restaurants used illegal aliens of Chinese and Hispanic origin as workers in their restaurants and subsequently laundered the proceeds from the operation of the restaurants. The workers in the restaurants were required to work on average 72 hours per week for minimal or no salary, far less than minimum wage. The defendants deposited the illegal proceeds from the operation of the restaurants into "nominee" bank accounts opened in the names of employees and family members in order to conceal the source and true ownership of the proceeds generated from the operation of the restaurants. The defendants used the proceeds for personal expenses and investments.

- In May Of 2005 ICE agents at the Lewistown, NY arrested 28 year-old fugitive David Kricheli, who was wanted for murder in Germany. Kricheli was a native of the Republic of Georgia who was wanted for murder and attempted murder in connection with a 1997 shooting incident in Lemgo, Germany, in which one individual was killed and another wounded. Kricheli was the subject of an Interpol "Red Notice." At the time of his arrest, Kricheli was using an alias and claiming to be a Canadian citizen born on ICE agents have learned that for the past several years, Kricheli has utilized this identity to enter the United States as a commercial truck driver. He was working as a truck driver when he was arrested. (Full Release May 5, 2005)
- Also in May, a Canadian jeweler was charged with attempting to smuggle \$279,775 in U.S. currency out of the country in violation of customs reporting laws. In addition to the cash smuggling charge, Jirayr Cerrahyan, a Canadian citizen, was charged with smuggling more than 3,000 pieces of jewelry and 50 vials of growth hormones out of the United States into Canada. The case developed during a secondary inspection by Customs and Border Protection Officers at the Champlain, N.Y. port of entry. Rouses Point ICE agents responded and took the lead in the investigation. (Full release May 31, 2005)

Significant removals and fugitive apprehensions included;

- Ramon Tapia - Vasquez a native of the Dominican Republic was removed from the United States in October 2005 following a 15-year sentence in New York prison. Vasquez was convicted of three counts of attempted murder, counts of weapons possession, attempted robbery and assault. All of the charges resulted from a botched robbery attempt. During the robbery attempt Tapia-Vasques fired shots at the police and wounded two innocent bystanders. He continued to commit crimes while behind bars and was convicted of weapons possession and drug smuggling.
- Also in October 24, 2005 Alexander Klein, an Israeli citizen and aggravated felon, was removed to Tel Aviv due to his extensive criminal record. Klein was convicted of several counts of Sexual Abuse and Sodomy against minors in Amherst, New York. He also had convictions for burglary, attempted burglary, larceny, possession of stolen property and forgery.
- In March of 2005, Canadian citizen and smuggler Van Chi Banh was deported back to Canada after serving a federal prison sentence in the United States. Banh was captured illegally entering the U.S. from Canada near Massena, and convicted of Alien Smuggling in federal district court.
- In October of 2004 Domingo Espinal of the Dominican Republic was deported based on his kidnapping conviction in New York State. Espinal kidnapped a woman at gunpoint and held her captive for several days while demanding money and drugs from her husband. The woman was rescued after she dropped a note out of a window and someone called the police.

Both Smith and Cleary attributed the successful year to the dedication and hard work of Buffalo ICE agents and officers. Both enforcement managers also thanked the United State's Attorneys office, other federal agencies and partners in state, county and local police agencies for their significant assistance and support throughout the year.

**# ICE #**

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICE seeks to prevent acts of terrorism by targeting the people, money and materials that support terror and criminal networks.*